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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 ANKARA 002109

SIPDIS

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [PREL](#) [OSCE](#) [TU](#)  
SUBJECT: TURKEY: DIYARBAKIR MAYOR ENVISIONS 2009 PROGRESS  
ON KURDISH ISSUES

REF: A. ADANA 51  
[1](#)B. ANKARA 2086

Classified By: Principal Officer Eric Green, for reasons 1.4 (b,d)

[1](#)1. (U) This is a Consulate Adana cable.

[1](#)2. (C) SUMMARY. Diyarbakir mayor Osman Baydemir voiced hope that the incoming Obama administration will address Turkey's Kurdish issue by mediating a dialogue that would result in an end to violence by the PKK and an expansion of Kurdish political rights, ideally in a federal system. He expressed confidence that the Turkish establishment is interested in changing its current failed policy and suggested that confidential negotiations could yield dividends. Baydemir predicted voters will rebuff the AKP in the March local elections, underscoring the need to deal with the DTP, whose success he claimed will enhance its leverage with the PKK. Pressed, Baydemir also acknowledged the PKK's responsibility for continued violence and the DTP's role in fueling incendiary rhetoric. End Summary

U.S., EU CAN CATALYZE A NEW BEGINNING IN 2009  
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[1](#)2. (C) During a December 4 meeting with Adana Principal Officer, Diyarbakir Mayor Osman Baydemir used the occasion of Barack Obama's recent election to offer a tour d'horizon on the Kurdish issue in Turkey. He said that the first priority is for the U.S. to diagnose the problem correctly, which will then allow it to identify the right tools to resolve it. Turkey, he observed, is important to both the U.S. and the EU; but a Turkey without reconciliation or internal justice cannot serve as a model for the Middle East. The solution to the Kurdish issue must be peaceful and democratic; it cannot be achieved with weapons, state weapons or PKK weapons.

[1](#)3. (C) The U.S. and EU to play a role in establishing a dialogue, he said. Once a process is underway, then we will look at the models being used elsewhere, such as American- or German-style federalism or the Basque autonomy example model in Spain. The core fact that must be understood, he said, is that Kurdistan is a region and we must have political rights. We have no objection to the supremacy of the Turkish flag and the Turkish parliament, but we want to have regional flag and parliament and the right for our children to learn Kurdish as a second language in school. Once we have a road-map to achieve these objectives, then the PKK weapons

can be silenced.

TURKISH ESTABLISHMENT READY FOR CHANGE  
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¶4. (C) The GOT, he said, made a huge mistake during the 1999-2005 PKK cease-fire, believing that the PKK had been defeated. Now members of the Turkish establishment and intellectuals recognize that the policy has been a failure and that a new approach is needed. As evidence, he noted that there has been virtually no opposition to the establishment of relations between Ankara and the KRG government in Erbil. He suggested that a first step would be for Kurdish leaders to reach confidential agreements with elements of the Turkish state ("the hidden part of the iceberg") on confidence-building measures that would lead to PKK disarmament. Violence, he said, is pushing us into a tunnel with no escape.

¶5. (C) The GOT should understand, he said, that the changes we are proposing will make Turkey stronger because it will be unified and at peace. PO noted that it is understandably hard for Turkey's leaders to accept this formulation as long as the PKK is launching lethal attacks on the country. Baydemir acknowledged PKK violence is counterproductive and claimed a strong showing by the DTP in the March 2009 local elections will give the party more leverage in pushing the PKK to stop violence and it will show the AKP government that violence is not the answer and it needs to conduct dialogue with the Kurds.

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¶6. (C) Baydemir also ascribed great significance to the PKK's congratulatory letter to President-elect Obama, claiming the gesture indicates the end of the organization's Marxist-Leninist ideology and a sign that it will be more flexible and tolerant, leading eventually to accepting opposition within the Kurdish community. The PKK, he said, weighs every statement it issues very carefully and the fact they made this statement should be treated as a important milestone. (Other contacts in Diyarbakir dismissed the PKK statement as a publicity stunt containing no coded signals about the organization's direction.)

AKP "FINISHED" IN THE SOUTHEAST  
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¶7. (C) Baydemir accused Erdogan and the AKP of grossly misinterpreting the results of the July 2007 general election, when the ruling party scored an impressive victory in Kurdish regions. Kurds, he said, were voting for change, based on AKP overtures to address the Kurdish issue and pursue democratic reforms. The AKP leadership, however, interpreted the result as an endorsement of the status quo and then became "drunk with success." The AKP, he said, is now "finished" in the region as a result of the government's mistakes, such as endorsing a cross-border attack on the PKK and reneging on promises of constitutional reform. Erdogan's rhetoric, which culminated last month when he told listeners in Hakkari to love Turkey or leave it, has also been hugely damaging.

¶8. (C) PO observed the DTP shares the responsibility to avoid provocative statements, such as the recent claim by a party vice-chair that a vote for AKP is a vote for war. Baydemir acknowledged that inflammatory rhetoric doesn't help and promised a more positive tone when the campaign starts in earnest, noting that one slogan the DTP will use is "We love it and won't leave it." Baydemir added that the DTP fears the AKP may be preparing for massive election fraud as an unusual number of names have been added to the voter rolls and for the first time in Turkish history significant authority over the adjudication of election disputes has shifted from the judiciary to the Interior Ministry.

¶9. (C) Despite his professed disappointment with the AKP, Baydemir said he retains a high level of confidence in President Gul and believed his planned December 7-8 visit to Diyarbakir (which was later cancelled due to Gul's health) had potential to improve the tone of the dialogue between Kurds and Ankara, which has been negative in recent weeks.

COMMENT

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¶10. (C) As the DTP's most prominent mayor since 2005, Baydemir has assumed the role of spokesman for moderation, emphasizing the need for violence to be replaced by negotiation. Unfortunately, Baydemir's professed interest in peaceful dialogue has been undermined by the PKK's unrelenting attacks on Turkey and its support for militancy within the DTP. Baydemir's vision of a changed landscape following the March elections is attractive; yet even if accurate, translating the attendant opportunities into a durable solution will require both sides -- perhaps with international encouragement -- many months to establish the requisite level of trust to facilitate the necessary changes.

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